

3.4. *Songs for Cassavetes* (2001): A shared strategy between U.S. independent filmmaking and underground music scenes

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Abstract

1991 was indicated by Dave Markey and Thurston Moore as “the year punk broke” in a film that documented the European tour of some indie bands: in 1991 “punk broke out” as a mass phenomenon of consumption, and, contemporaneously, was “broken, it should be fixed”, in reason of a damaged underground identity (Moore, 2011).

This paper explores how Justin Mitchell’s DIY documentary *Songs for Cassavetes* contributed to fix the status of the so-called “American indie underground” (Azerrad, 2002). Mitchell portrayed with b/w 16mm film the shared *milieu* of the DIY scenes, as the K Records with Calvin Johnson in Olympia-WA, the community-based activity of the Make-Up in Washington-DC, plus several indie acts interviewed in all-ages venues. Furthermore, the film displayed the map as a key-tool for visualizing such scenes. This convergence between independent filmmaking and DIY spaces and practices suggested a way to restore the image of the underground scenes.

Keywords: alternative/indie rock, underground music scenes, independent filmmaking, 1990s, DIY.

1. 1991: The year punk broke

It is a well-known fact that in the 1990s many U.S. indie² bands as R.E.M. and Nirvana broke through the charts worldwide. They came from such music scenes as Athens, GA and Seattle, WA, where, at first, they were produced by independent labels as I.R.S., Sub Pop, and SST Records, and, afterward, signed with the majors. Early 1991 the iconic indie band R.E.M. topped the no. 1 position in the U.S. and U.K. charts with the seventh record *Out of time* (Warner Bros.); later in the year, Nirvana’s second record *Nevermind* (DGC) came out and reached the no. 1 position in the U.S. Billboard 200, as well as in other national charts, definitely labelling grunge music³. From now on, those bands will be considered co-opted by the mainstream *apparatus*, and their position in the context of the underground scenes will be criticized and considered problematic (see: Azerrad, 2002; Kruse, 2003). In light of this, Azerrad considered the year 1991 as the end of an era for the “American indie underground” (2002, pp. 3-11).

These music releases were strictly connected with the production of films and videos — made on, or by those bands — which contributed to the completion of their artistic image and identity. Considering all these aspects, 1991 was also indicated by filmmaker Dave Markey and Sonic Youth’s member Thurston Moore as “the year punk broke” in a film that documented the European tour of some of those bands in the summer of the same year. Most of the acts that appeared in the movie already left their indie label for joining a major (i.e., Sonic Youth, Nirvana, Dinosaur Jr., Mudhoney). “In 1991” — Moore explained — “punk broke out”, as a mass

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² According to Holly Kruse, I will use the expression “indie music” to include different terms that refers to quite the same genre in a specific music culture, such as college rock, alternative rock, indie pop-rock (see Kruse, 2003, pp. 6-13).

³ No. 1 position in U.S.A., Canada, Finland, France, Portugal, Sweden; No. 2 position in Australia, Austria, Norway, New Zealand, Spain, Switzerland; No. 3 position in Germany and Netherlands.

phenomenon of consumption, and, at the same time, “it was broken, it should be fixed”, since its underground identity was considered damaged (2011⁴). Between 1991 and 1992 Markey screened *1991: The year punk broke*, produced with the financial support of DGC, and *Reality 86’d*, a tour-diary of Black Flag’s extensive live activity in the U.S. self-produced with Dez Cadena. In 1992 Sonic Youth published “Dirty” (DGC), their best-selling record to date. They smashed MTV with two videoclips: “100%” — directed by indie filmmakers Tarma Davis with Spike Jonze and played by the skateboard star Jason Lee — and “Sugar Kane” — directed by visual design artist Nick Egan and played by Sassy Magazine star Chloë Sevigny — in which the band is performing in New York City during a “Grunge Collection” fashion show designed by Marc Jacobs for Perry Ellis.

2. American independent cinema and indie music

Holly Kruse started her thorough study on independent music scenes identifying this moment as a turning point in the history of indie music, a chiefly oral history made by the scenes’ members:

Recurrent in narratives of indie pop/rock is the conscious geographical and ideological positioning of the ‘peripheral’ local sites and practices of indie music production. As, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, forms of indie music became part of the commercial mainstream, narrative histories of indie music marked the moment as a time of the genre’s decline (2003, p. 1).

In order to fully understand the U.S. film context of the 1990s in relation to such music subjects, I will make reference to other relevant indie productions. In the midst of the decade, Doug Pray produced and directed the documentary *Hype!* (1996) on the popular alternative rock scene of Seattle, a debut film independently produced and distributed by Lions Gate, a prototypical “mini-major”. By the initial sequence, the movie connected the U.S. Northwest area and its landscape, as well as the city life and its pace, with the careers of regional musicians. Among them appeared well-known acts such as Soundgarden, Mudhoney and Nirvana — jumped from the local indie Sub Pop to the majors A&M, Reprise/Warner Bros, and DGC — as well as underground personalities as Calvin Johnson, founder of the trio Beat Happening and the label K Records, and the band Some Velvet Sidewalk, all members of the DIY scene of Olympia, WA. *Hype!* was focused on the complex representation of “grunge” and its exploitation, still dealing with how a peripheral place became a central stage, and with the problematic relation between alternative and mainstream. As an indie film, *Hype!* adopted a production model in which the operational phases and the creative aspects were conducted by an independent company, while the distribution and the promotion were operated by a mini-major.

In 1996, when *Hype!* was presented at Sundance Film Festival and released in cinemas, Justin Mitchell started the self-funded documentary film project *Songs for Cassavetes*, with the aim of framing the actual status of the U.S. indie underground scenes. The shootings were made between 1996 and 1997 using b/w 16mm films, then the footage was edited for another two years; due to the complex and expensive process behind the making of a movie with analog films, *Songs for Cassavetes* was presented in 2001. In the same years, Jem Cohen was completing the film/video *Instrument* (1999-2001), a definite portrait of the band Fugazi that described their key-role within the contexts of Washington, D.C., and the American underground scenes. *Instrument* covered a long time period, from 1987 to 1998, and included not only Cohen’s shootings, but also found footage collected from the scenes’ members and new Super-8 footage shot by the crew and band’s members during an international tour. Following Fugazi and Cohen work ethic (see Savlov, 1999; Sinker, 2001, pp. 2-19, 174-181; Azerrad, 2002, pp. 376-410), *Instrument* was fully self-funded, mainly through the band’s Dischord Records.

⁴ Last view: 12 September 2016.

Songs for Cassavetes were neither a biographical film made with collected materials, as *Instrument* was, nor was it a diary film on the life on tour of those bands, such as *The year punk broke* and *Reality*; similarly to *Hype!*, it developed the storyline through a choral narration within the city and its scene, but enclosed a different strategy, which was working to “fix” the “broken” status of that “American indie underground” by strengthening an operational convergence between filmmaking and music scenes. A strategy that started by a title that tributed John Cassavetes, widely considered the archetype of the American independent filmmaker. A strategy that, in the U.S. indie cinema of the 1990s, was adopted by DIY filmmakers as Cohen or Sadie Benning when they decided to create non-fictional forms, since those forms may be considered “primary” forms. So references to early, experimental, documentary, and direct cinema became the bases for the works of those filmmakers. They explored the *amateurish* approach of the first wave of U.S. vanguards to produce and distribute DIY films and videos within the contexts of the independent music scenes and cinema, such as Cohen with C-Hundred Film Corp. in Athens, a production label founded in 1987 by the filmmaker Jim McKay and R.E.M.’s singer Michael Stipe, and Benning with the Sundance Film Festival in Park City, UT, which in 1992 hosted the screenings of her early videos in the New Queer Cinema Panel.

Just to frame the context of the 1990s, some successful indie movies were *Singles* (1992) by Cameron Crowe — set in Seattle during the grunge era, while starred and scored by musicians as Chris Cornell (Soundgarden) and Paul Westerberg (Replacements) — *Clerks* (1994) by Kevin Smith and — Seigny film debut’s — *Kids* (1995) by Larry Clark and Harmony Korine. These fiction films, which involved the extensive use of contemporary indie music, were basically conceived by autonomous labels and distributed by majors. From the 1990s such hybrid production model will be widely adopted in the American independent cinema, and will lead towards an operational framework defined as “Indiewood” (see King, 2009; King, Molloy & Tzioumakis, 2013).

3. U.S. independent music scenes and *Songs for Cassavetes*

As Will Straw pointed out in a prominent essay in 1991, in the alternative rock culture many practices coexist within the same geographical location of the scene, where time is stratified by enacting different strategies, such as the simultaneous use of multiple styles. Within the positioning in the urban space of the scene, the ongoing practices of “cross-fertilization” and “differentiation” in the present time become the core of the music productions. Furthermore, as Barry Shank put it, in the scene the venue is elected as the primary place because it enables the process of identification between performers and audience through the expression of “sincerity”, “in a carnivalesque atmosphere” where the club functions “as a cultural synecdoche” (1994, pp. 15-18). As outlined by Kruse, in the independent music scenes the concepts of “identification” and “identity” are central and establish a dialectic between “us”, the members, and “them”, the others, where “we” are the “outsiders” (2003, pp. 5-6, 119). The terms “authentic” and “authenticity” constantly occurred in the narratives of the scenes’ members, particularly in connection with the idea of “selling out”. These discourses attempt to trace the spaces of such scenes by questioning where those “blurred boundaries” between independent and mainstream actually are compared to “problematic” indie bands such as R.E.M., Sonic Youth, and Nirvana (2003, pp. 14-24, 121-138).

Let’s get back to the film. *Songs for Cassavetes* is a choral narration made up by the interviews taken by the members of the underground scenes of Olympia, Washington, D.C., San Francisco and Los Angeles, CA: the bands PeeChees, Tullycraft, Memy’s Dress, Make-Up, Hi-Fives, Sleater-Kinney, Further, Some Velvet Sidewalk, Unwound, Dub Narcotic Sound System; the owners of the club Jabberjaw in L.A., of the K Records, and of the YoYo Studio in Olympia. All the interviewees are musicians and active members in the scene as producers of records and fanzines, as well as promoters of clubs and concerts. The movie collected these recordings together with the shots of the live performances of the bands mainly in all ages venues, leaving the filmic space to the “insiders” of the independent scenes. In comparison with Kruse’s empirical study and theoretical

framework, every tool of such scenes is filmed and mentioned — i.e., records labels and sites of distribution as radio, video, retail, live venues, fanzines and music journalism — following the ideas of “locality” as “geographically” and “socially defined” (2003, p. 113), as well as of the intrinsic conjunction between “locality and interlocality” (2003, p. 137). Thus, key features of the independent scenes highlighted in the movie are “interconnectedness” and “cooperation” (Kruse, 2003, p. 125-136). In addition to this, every DIY place and space is chosen by Mitchell to be paradigmatic of the “peripheral local sites and practices of indie music production and consumption in opposition to the ‘centers’ of mainstream music production” (Kruse, 2003, p.1). By this consideration, we should take into the account the absence of any mention to Seattle, nearby Olympia, from the film, and interpret it as a problematic issue. If *Hype!* established the main viewpoint from Seattle, and its choral narration represented many different regional musicians — from Olympia and Bellingham, WA, too — *Songs for Cassavetes* didn’t deal with such a contested “alternative rock” context — the newest “mainstream center” — in order to present only consolidated facts and structures connected to the underground music scenes.

4. A shared strategy between underground scenes and independent filmmaking

In line with a filmmaking strategy that basically works to create a sort of objectivity, we may start noticing that in *Songs for Cassavetes* the director/interviewer is purposely a silent presence, who never participated with his voice to the discussion in any forms (e.g., voice over), this way embodying the spectator’s viewpoint. A guiding role in mapping this underground is covered by Calvin Johnson, the internal narrator, whose interview connects each topic and band.

The initial sequence of the film, made up by two parts, is Mitchell’s mission statement in musical and filmic terms. The first sub-sequence opens with two title cards: the text “a Breadcrumb Trail presents” / “an all ages film by Justin Mitchell” appears on a freeze frame shot in a concert venue, from behind the stage, while non-diegetic jazz music is playing. These title cards declare that we are going to watch an all ages DIY film self-produced by an independent filmmaker, a film that tributes Cassavetes’ legacy and his filmmaking debut *Shadows* (1957-1969). The rest of the sub-sequence shows the indoor spaces of K Records through a series of four images, two establishing shot with a slow zoom and two panning shots, which recall the techniques adopted in Andy Warhol and Paul Morrissey’s music film *Velvet Underground and Nico: A Symphony of Sound* (1966) and in Michael Snow’s experimental film *Wavelength* (1967). These images move from the DIY spaces (the studio and the label) to the DIY media (studio equipment and records), while Johnson’s voice over explains the background before the 1990s turning point:

Things were just so tight and compressed in the 1980s, and peoples’ attitudes, they’re so geared towards the mainstream and what the mainstream was (...) This nebulous mainstream (...) And it’s just the Reagan era, things are so conservative there was no crossover, what we were doing the underground and then there was Huey Lewis and the News, nothing in between, and it would never would occur to us that what we were doing, that anyone in that world would be interested in what we were doing, we weren’t interested in what they were doing. It was completely separate. In the 1990s all that changed⁵.

The sub-sequence closes with the title card “Songs for Cassavetes” on another freeze frame-shot of a dark concert venue, while the soundtrack reproduces some distorted noise recorded from a live performance. This transition brings to the second sub-sequence, in which every band is presented with a title card impressed on a brief scene of them playing live on stage, while the non-

⁵ An official transcription of the film was never published. This version was kindly provided by Allison Grimaldi-Donahue.

diegetic insert of the song "Pop Songs Your Boyfriend's Too Stupid to Know About" by the Tullycraft, an indie band from Seattle, is playing over.

This intro is a declaration of the authorial intents based on the choral narration of differentiated acts (bands' name and images), the creation of DIY artifacts for the dissemination of indie music (K Records studio and distribution storage), the centrality of performance in music and of the all-ages venues, and, lastly, the tribute to a leading independent filmmaker (Cassavetes), as well as to non-fictional film forms (experimental cinema). The film proceeds portraying the shared *milieu* of the DIY scenes "at work": the K Records with Johnson and the YoYo Studios in Olympia, the political community-based activity of the Make-Up in D.C., the cultural activities of Jabbberjaw in L.A., Lookout! Recordshop in Berkeley, CA, plus several indie acts interviewed and filmed live in the venues with their audience (e.g., Peechees, Hi-Fives, Sleater Kinney, Unwound). So most of the film contents are an expression of the independent music scenes "recurring" topics, here briefly summarized in the order in which they are presented in the documentary:

- the dialectic between underground and mainstream;
- the idea of "us" and "them" ("the other");
- "us" as the "outsiders" compared to the mainstream world, as well as the "insiders" of the underground scenes;
- a chronology of indie music: rock'n'roll music "before" and "after" punk;
- the celebration of the amateurish approach;
- underground as a self-sufficient and community-based context;
- the establishment of an underground independent network;
- "taking hold of the media, taking control back from people, who had sort of become a monopoly in a lot of ways" (Johnson: Cool Rays, Beat Happening, The Go Team, Dub Narcotic Sound System, and The Halo Benders' singer and guitarist; K-Records owner; International Pop Underground Convention's organizer);
- no interest in being "popular", rather in "do it by myself" and "follow your own path" (Al Larsen: Some Velvet Sidewalk's singer and K Records' co-owner);
- the idea of a common strength within the underground scenes;
- life "on the van" means that "people welcome you", "you get into the backdoor of the communities" (John Denery: Hi-Fives' guitarist and singer), "you get to meet people, see the world, and it's a great opportunity" (Sara Lund: Unwound's drummer);
- the visualization of the scenes through the images of the city-maps as "us";
- feminism and women in indie music, plus the relation with fanzine and music journalism (Molly Neuman: PeeChees, Frumpies, and Bratmobile's drummer; *Riot Grrrls* zine founder; Lookout! Records owner);
- mainstream media work against the interconnectedness of the scenes: "they try to take us out of context and act as if we are not part of a larger community or musical environment", "our record and our success and our failures have everything to do with our community" (Carrie Brownstein: Sleater-Kinney and Excuse 17's guitarist and singer);
- "your responsibility as an artist" (Corin Tucker: Sleater-Kinney and Heavens so Betsy's guitarist and singer);
- DIY records as media that circulate within the underground network: "We're not manufacturing products to be consumed. We are documenting artistic expression and we're making it available to people interested in it and experiencing it" (Johnson);
- "selling out" means losing "togetherness" and "connection", as well as feeling exploited when, before, things were done together and reciprocally within the underground context (Chris Imlay: Hi-Fives' guitarist and singer);

- the visualization of the mainstream through the images of the corporations as “them”;
- all ages shows;
- aging as an issue to solve.

So the core of *Songs for Cassavetes* are the productive spaces of the DIY cultures, spaces in common and shared by different scenes that are located in a trans-local network, in which the bodies are collectively inscribed in the present moment. The movement becomes a crucial factor, and it enables to leave traces: of the bodies in a specific local space, the scene, as well as of the bodies’ movements on the geographical space of the network, during the tours and due to record selling. As Straw pointed out:

A scene resists deciphering, in part, because it mobilizes local energies and moves these energies in multiple directions — onwards, to later reiterations of itself; outwards, to more formal sorts of social or entrepreneurial activity; upwards, to the broader coalescing of cultural energies within which collective identities takes shape (2004, p. 412).

The filmmaking process of *Songs for Cassavetes* may be reconducted to two “modes of representation” that define how such documentary communicates with the spectator, as they are outlined by Bill Nichols in *Representing Reality* (1991). First of all, it is set “the observational mode”, in which the filmmaker is an “invisible presence behind the camera to take paradigmatic form around an exhaustive depiction of the everyday”. This modality highlights the idea of “cinema of ‘present-tense’ representation” where “the presence of the camera ‘on the scene’ testifies to its presence in the historical world; its fixity suggests a commitment or engagement with the immediate, intimate, and personal that is comparable to what an actual observer/participant might experience” (Nichols, 1991, p. 40). This mode is mostly adopted during the live music scenes, when the interviewed bands are playing on stage and the camera is shooting them from the audience. According to Nichols, in this framework “recurring images or situations tend to strengthen a ‘reality effect’, anchoring the film to the historical activity of time and place and certifying to the continuing centrality of specific locations” (1991, p. 41). The “observational mode” presents the contents of the filmic representation as “real” events, given facts that avoid any interferences with the objectivity agreed between who sees and what is seen.

Several aspects of the filmmaking in *Songs for Cassavetes* underline another key-modality, “the interactive mode”, in which “the filmmaker need not be only a cinematic, recording eye” and the “images of testimony or verbal exchange and images of demonstration” are stressed (Nichols, 1991, p. 44). Even if Mitchell’s voice is not present in the editing, his “face-to-face” presence is assumed by the characters that are talking directly to the camera, or chatting with each other. This mode is crucial to give the film protagonists those authentic personal voices of the underground. As Nichols pointed out, in the interactive documentaries “textual authority shifts toward the social actors recruited: their comments and responses provide a central part of the film’s argument. Various forms of monologue and dialogue (...) predominate”, while “issues of comprehension and interpretation, as a function of physical encounter, arise (1991, p. 44). A key-tool adopted in *Songs for Cassavetes* is the interview in the form of “pseudomonologue”, which stresses “the visible presence of the social actor as evidentiary witness and the visible absence of the filmmaker (the filmmaker’s presence as absence)” (1991, p. 54):

The pseudomonologue violates the dictum ‘Don’t look at the camera’ in order to achieve a more immediate sense of being addressed by the subject. The pseudomonologue makes the viewer *the* subject of the cinematic address, erasing the very mediations of filmmaker/subject/viewer that the interactive mode accentuates. (...) The sense of bodily presence, rather than absence, locates and holds the filmmaker to the scene, even when masked by certain strategies for interviewing or representing encounter. Viewers expect conditional information and situated or representing encounter (1991, p. 54-56, emphasis on text).

Lastly, we should take into the account that there is a unique image in the film in which Mitchell established a “reflexive mode”, when Tucker of the Sleater-Kinney talks about the “responsibility of the artist”. Apparently out of context, this single shot of the sound recordist and the interviewer seated on the street in front of Tucker is inserted at this point of the film’s argument — still quoting Nichols — “to prompt the viewer to a heightened consciousness of his or her relation to the text and of the text’s problematic relationship to which it represents. (...) The sense of vicarious transport into the historical world doubles back on the trail of representation itself” (1991, pp. 60-62).

In short, we may synthesize that the “objective mode” makes the independent scenes visible and the underground network as a fair and open possibility to produce music and art by using the DIY tools, media and means; at the same time, the “interactive mode” stresses the feelings of encounter and togetherness between the scenes’ members and the film crew, while a “reflexive” image remembers that we are active viewers in front of the film. Finally, we cannot forget that those contents should be put in relation with a “bigger picture”, which are the historical, economic, social and cultural aspects that affect our daily life.

The film closes in a circular way: PeeChees’ drummer talks about the critical aspect of “aging”, and leads towards the quote of Cassavetes read collectively by a member of each band one at a time:

My films are expressive of a culture that has had the possibility of attaining material fulfillment while at the same time finding itself unable to accomplish the simple business of conducting human lives.

We have been sold a bill of goods as a substitute for life (...)

(...) In this country people die at the age of 21. They die emotionally at 21, maybe younger.

My responsibility as an artist is to help them past 21.

- John Cassavetes

Even if the end credits terminate, Mitchell lets the final song — “Spectacles” by the D.C.’s indie band Chisel — running on a black screen, in order to create for the spectator a transition from the film to real life conducted solely by the music.

5. Tools for an audiovisual history of the indie underground: Mapping and self-narration

Cassavetes’ quote gives final evidence of the mutual alliance between independent filmmaking and underground scenes established. The film recalls a sketched chronology — “before and after punk”, “before and after the co-optation” — to re-establish an original identity for the U.S. underground music scenes and gives a representation of them as “authentic”. As Kruse outlined:

In indie music culture, the debate over authenticity was part of a larger struggle over the meaning of indie music. For many indie music scene participants, certain entities seeking to define the music (major labels, retail chains, large-scale promoters) were understood to be less ‘authentic’ than others (independent labels, non-chain retailers, small clubs) contesting the same terrain. Mainstream popularity was sometimes expressly avoided by many scene participants who wish to define themselves by their difference from the mainstream. (...) Chronology is an important framework for the narrative, especially as it charts the significance of the music’s movement from the margin (when it was ‘authentic’) to mainstream recognition (its moment of perceived decline as artists and institutions ‘sell out’) (2003, p. 14).

Therefore, references to the past are part of the validation process of the such scenes. Particularly, the link with Cassavetes connected the film to a tradition of independent cinema that possibly skipped the New Hollywood and the “half-co-opted” indie cinema of the 1990s mainly associated with the alternative rock: a filmmaking strategy that comes back to the field of reality — its primary “location” — and includes practices of hybridization and experimentation, in account

of a history of works that includes the *amateur* city films of the 1920s, Maya Deren avant-garde films, Jonas Mekas' diary films, and *cinema-verité* movies as Cassavetes' *Shadows* and *Faces* (1968). At the same time, the narratives of the musicians, in the scene as well as in *Songs for Cassavetes*, are centred on "a sense of *place*" that is "significant to them", where those "culturally and economically marginal localities and local spaces" become lively scenes in an underground network (2003, p. 14, emphasis in text). Thus, the filmmaking strategy in *Songs for Cassavetes* is entailed in the intrinsic connection among indie music identity, locality, and interlocality, and in the crucial relation between place and memory. This filmic self-produced representation and mapping of such DIY places and spaces at the end of the 1990s suggested a way to "fix" a damaged underground identity, restore the image of those independent scenes, and preserve their authenticity.

By the same token, in *Songs for Cassavetes* different map images of the cities where each scene is located became a key-tool, both to "visualize" the traces of the scene's members, as well as to "enable" the existence of a trans-local network. As they are recalled in *Instrument* and used in *Songs for Cassavetes* and *American Hardcore* (2001-2006), these maps make such underground scenes visible, going over their "iconophobia" for any mediatic representation that might be out of their control — a concept connected with the visibility of the scenes, as outlined by Straw during the K.I.S.M.I.F. Conference 2014 (2015, pp. 410-411). According to Teresa Castro (2008), in many contemporary films a "mapping impulse" is present as a way of outlining an autobiographical narration, about "myself" and "us". An impulse that broadly characterized many types of U.S. narrations since, as the literature scholar Gerry Reaves puts it, in the "American identity: the personal is the geographical" (2001). As pointed out by Andy Bennett, the relation between cultural memory and emotional geography is crucial to understand such music phenomena (see upcoming: Bennett & Rogers, 2016). In his plenary lecture at the beginning of the K.I.S.M.I.F. Conference 2016, Bennett outlined how the relation between "DIY music scenes and memory" is:

- locally situated within translocal connections;
- fostered and maintained through locally situated network of production, performance and consumption;
- inscribed with a sense of belonging that often links successive generations of scenerests over time;
- part of micro-histories of specific urban and regional locations that often exist only in collective memories of those involved.

At the core of new studies on the 1990s music culture, as Catherine Strong's insightful book on grunge (2011), the relation between memory and music has become the key, in most of the documentary films produced from the mid-2000s, to explore the DIY underground scenes of the 1980s and 1990s, and create the audiovisual history of indie music. A few significant titles are: Tim Irwin's *We Jam Econo* (2005) on the band Minutemen; Steven Blush and Paul Rachman's *American Hardcore* (2006) on the U.S. hardcore scene; Scott Crawford's *Salad Days: a decade of punk in Washington, DC 1980-90* (2015) on the DIY punk scene in D.C.

To conclude, as well as *Shadows*, *Songs for Cassavetes* is a celebration of present time, and of the vital activities of the underground music scenes. Its excitement for the "togetherness", the "connectedness", and the "doing by yourself" — and ourselves — is the antidote to a wider poetics, in the independent cinema of the 1990s, of loneliness, violence, and death, and to the possible exploitation of such traumatic visions that are, at first, produced by independent film companies. In a culture that looked to be centred on the idea of the "corpse", as noted in a provocative way by Hal Forster (1994), this small movie shows how such bodies are more than alive: they are active actors that may inspire changes and influence personal and collective daily life.

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